
BWSR FEATURED PLANT

TUSSOCK SEDGE *Carex stricta*

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Tussock sedge is a species that is found in a wide variety of Minnesota wetland plant communities and is often a dominant plant in sedge meadows. Its ability to form mounds as old leaves die allows the plant to rise above the water table and grow in shallow marsh conditions as well as in saturated soils. The mounds also provide habitat for a wide variety of other plant species, adding to the habitat value. Tussock sedge is a relatively adaptable species, but it has been replaced by reed canary grass and hybrid cattail in many areas of the state and it is susceptible to over grazing, water fluctuations and waves.



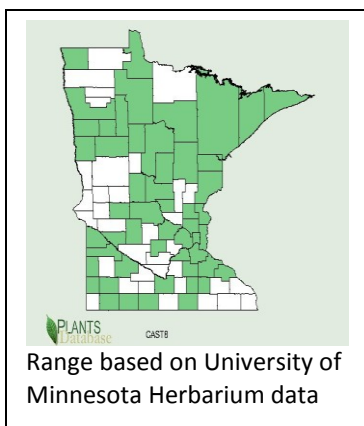
Tussock sedge growing on the edge of a stream

Identification

The mounds formed by this species (often reaching 2-3 feet tall) can be helpful with identification, though in saturated soils tussock sedge may not form mounds and may be interspersed with other species in large masses. There are other Minnesota sedges that look similar to tussock sedge including *C. emoryi* (distinct veins on perigynia), *C. aquatilis* (no brown leaf blade at base), *C. haydenii* (scale longer than perigynia). None of these species form tussocks.

The leaves of tussock sedge are 2-6 mm wide. The lowest leaves are reduced to brown scales. Lower sheaths have ladder-like strands up the base. Stems are triangular and rough to the touch and reach up to 1-m in height. Flowers consist of 1-3 narrow male spikes above the fruited female spikes (2-5 spikes). Female scales are pointed or rounded at the tips and are shorter than the perigynia.

Tussock sedge is one of three Minnesota sedges that look very similar but have different growth habits.



Range

The range of tussock sedge includes most of Minnesota; it also ranges into Canada and is found in the eastern half of the United States with the exception of Florida. The plant's versatility allows it to be found in sedge meadows, shallow marshes, fens, shores, streambanks, and ditches. The species favors sunlight, so it is most often found in full sun and is not a dominant plant in forested plant communities.



Ladder-like strands on lower leaf sheath

Uses

The mounds formed by the species create microclimates that are beneficial to wildlife, including frogs, toads and salamanders, as well as birds such as rails and snipe. The seeds are used by a variety of wildlife including small mammals, songbirds, mallards, wood ducks, and turkeys. The mounds are also used as perching sites for many bird species.

Tussock sedge is used to stabilize banks as part of streambank and lakeshore restorations. It is also used in raingarden and biofiltration systems for aesthetic purposes, to absorb water, and to take up nitrogen and phosphorus.



Female flower spike, scales shorter than perigynia

Planting Recommendations

Tussock sedge can be planted by seed, plugs or transplants. The seeds of tussock sedge are ripe and can be collected in the first or second week of June. The tiny seeds need light to germinate, so they should be planted at the soil surface through broadcast seeding. It is common to conduct a fall dormant seeding for tussock sedge to allow the seed to naturally stratify over winter. The seed will germinate best in conditions of saturated soil.

Plugs of tussock sedge are available from many native plant nurseries, as it is a species that is popular for raingardens and lakeshore plantings, as well as wetland restorations. It is recommended to plant the plugs in saturated soils and in areas where water levels will not rise above the height of the plant, as this may kill the plugs. Spacing between plants should depend on the project type and whether seeding is conducted in combination with the plug planting. Typical spacing is between 1.5 and 3 feet. Larger containers are sometimes used where more rapid establishment is needed or where water levels may fluctuate. Supplemental watering may be needed in some cases as plugs are vulnerable to dry conditions. A minimum of one inch of water per week is needed to ensure survival during the growing season and prior to winter.

Tussock sedge requires stratification to promote germination, so it is common to plant the species in late fall.

Clumps of tussock sedge can be separated into many plants when transplanting the species. When transplanting, it is important to only collect in areas of large populations that are stable, to only collect a small percentage of the population and to minimize disturbance. A section of the plant that was removed should be replanted to the same hole where the plant was dug and leaves and debris should be spread around the plant to prevent moisture loss and to prevent weed growth. Transplanting from natural areas is generally discouraged to prevent disturbance and weed invasion.

Additional References

Minnesota Wetland Restoration Plant ID Guide

<http://www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/wrp/plantid/about.html>

<http://uwarboretum.org/publications/leaflets/PDF/Leaflet22.pdf>